BTHC 2-1-91
Teofilos

TEOFILO'S
RESTAURANTE

At the Historic Wittwer House

NEW MEXICO CUISINE

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TEOFILO'S
RESTAURANTE

THE WITTWER HOUSE

The distinctive appeal of this house lies not in any claim to notoriety or historical significance, but rather in the special nature of its builder, Dr. W. F. Wittwer.

Destiny brought Dr. Wittwer to the simple little adobe village of Los Lunas at the age of 28 when his train stopped en route to El Paso. The year was 1899, and the young doctor was on his way to pursue a promising career as a railroad physician. Coming from the more civilized east, he was graphically introduced to the ''Wild West'' with the silent greeting of some poor soul suspended from the ''Cottonwood Hanging Tree' in front of the courthouse.

Dr. Wittwer's talents were recognized during his stopover by the Huning family. They offered the doctor a handsome sum of fifty dollars a month to practice in Los Lunas. Probably for reasons other than money, he agreed to remain as the village's first physician. This decision led to the span of sixty-five years of service to a loving and appreciative community.

This house was built for Dr. Wittwer in 1913 on land purchased from the Solomon Luna estate. The specifications were provided by the doctor and his wife, Anna Nowlin.

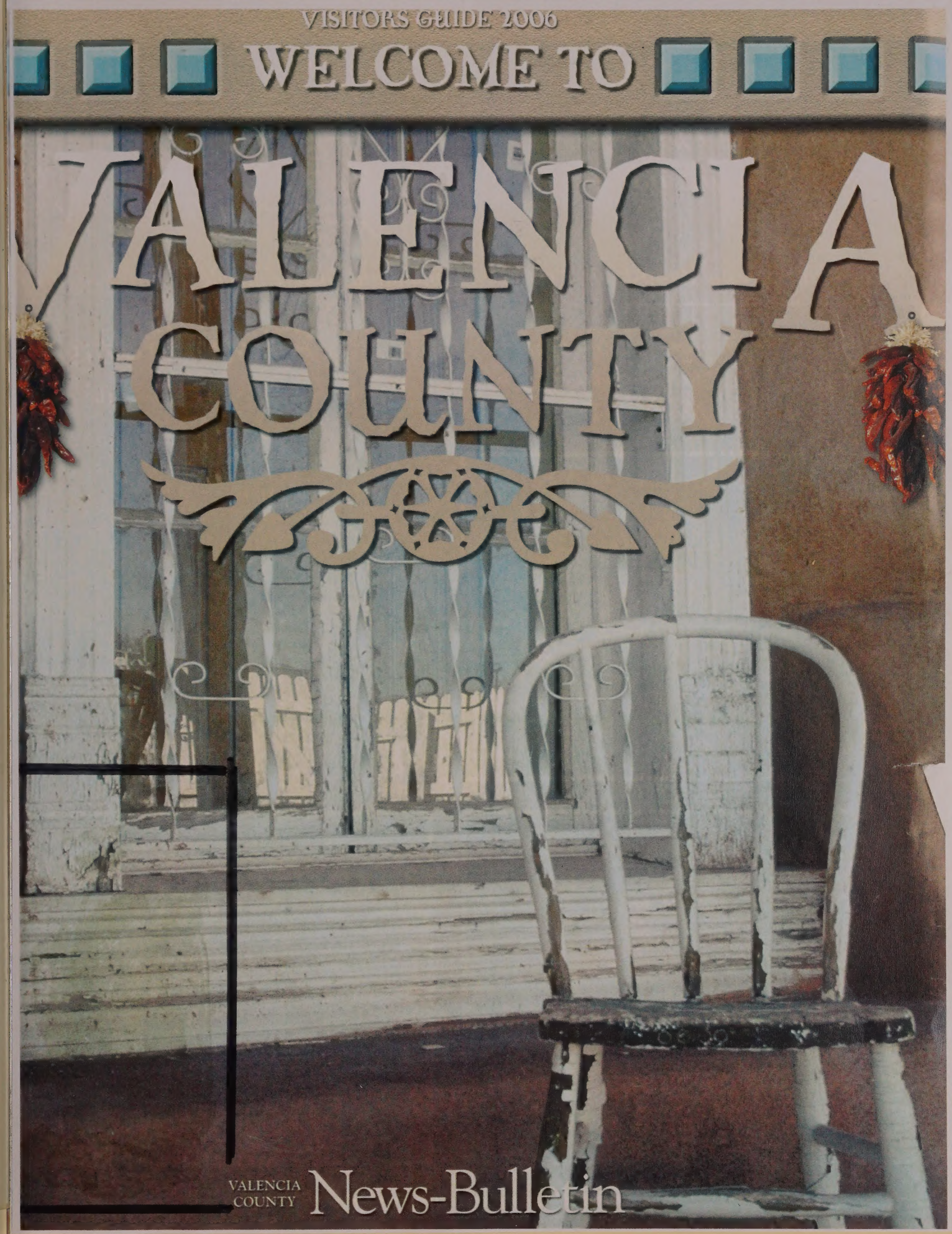
The architectural design was in keeping with the period and features terron-wall construction and high-pitched, corrugated tin roof. Spanish structural and ornamental design prevalent in the area abounds the house, giving it its unique charm.

To maintain and preserve our distinctive old New Mexico architecture, this house is registered as a State Landmark, It has been restored to recapture the atmosphere of historical Los Lunas. In the same tradition, the Torres family features authenic New Mexico cuisine, prepared much the same as it was in Dr. Wittwer's days as a young physician.

Thank you for your patronage,
Hortencia and Pete T. (Teofilo) Torres

VISITORS GUIDE 2006

WELCOME TO VALENCIA COUNTY



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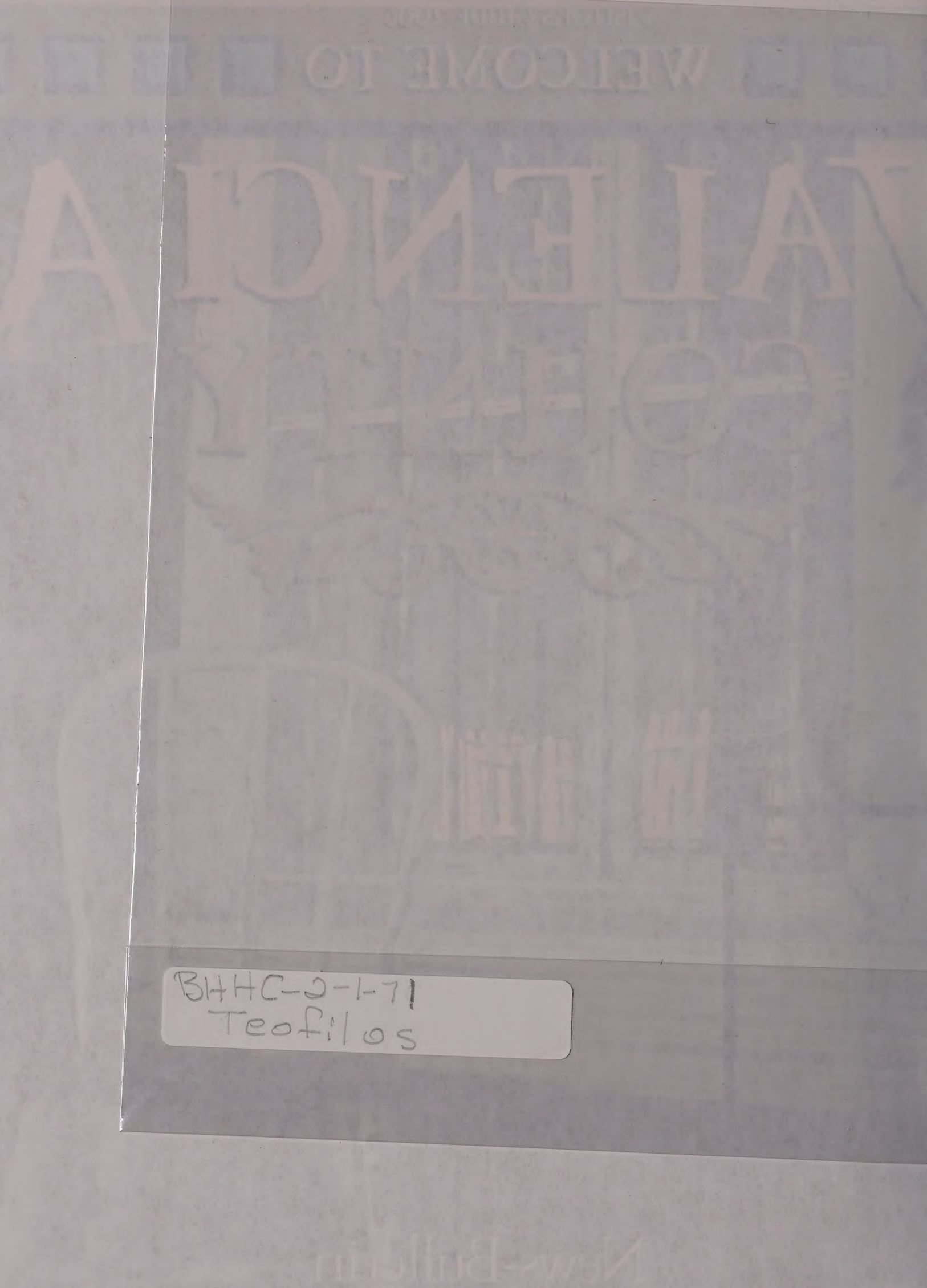

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LA CASA DEL MILLONARIO

Historic house with a ghost story

EL MILLONARIO

from page 26

— also known as "El Millonario" — lives on today.

The task of renovating the old house wasn't an easy one, Baca said. And it's still not completed.

When the family first bought the house, all the windows were broken, four inches of dirt covered the floors, the walls were cracked and much of the interior wood had decomposed. Even though there was a lot of work ahead of them, the Bacas never thought it couldn't be done.

"We started patching and plastering and we were able to salvage all of the windows," Ymelda said. "This was, and still is, a labor of love and we've put our entire lives into this house. We're trying to keep the Spanish Colonial style throughout the house and have come across some great deals.

"We're not finished, and I don't think we'll ever be finished. This is a work in progress. We are now on what we call phase two. We're working on what was known as the servant's quarters on the other side of the courtyard. I'm still not sure what we're going to do with it — maybe a museum."

Another attraction the Bacas hope will draw crowds is a ghost story. Some people believe the spirit to be that of Felipe's daughter, Margarita Chavez. It's said that because her father left her out of his will, her spirit still roams the house.

Ymelda said she has never seen an apparition or felt uneasy in the house, but there have been a few unexplained occurrences. She recalled one day when they polished the wooden floor in the front foyer and left for a few hours. When they returned, they could clearly see small, bare footprints trailing across the floor.

"At first, we thought someone had come back into the house," Ymelda said. "But we knew that couldn't have happened. They looked like they were the footprints of a woman. We've never been able to explain that one."

While it doesn't happen every day, or even every week, once in a while the family will go into the house and find that a water faucet has been turned on. LeRoy has also heard from people who say they've heard music coming from the house, seen a rocking chair move when no one is sitting in it or people sitting around a table playing cards.

As for the future of the Felipe Chavez house, the Bacas will continue to rent it out for weddings, parties, reunions and retreats. But their main objective is to educate people about history and culture.

Ymelda, LeRoy and Gretta will be hosting monthly events that will include history lessons, ghost stories, music festivals, poetry readings, art exhibits and plays. She said the house will also be open for field trips for school children.

For information, call 565-3167.

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A DOCTOR'S HISTORIC HOME

Diners welcome

BY CLARA GARCIA

Valencia County is a land of many treasures. The history of this county can still be experienced every day by just walking into a number of old buildings that have been restored and revered.

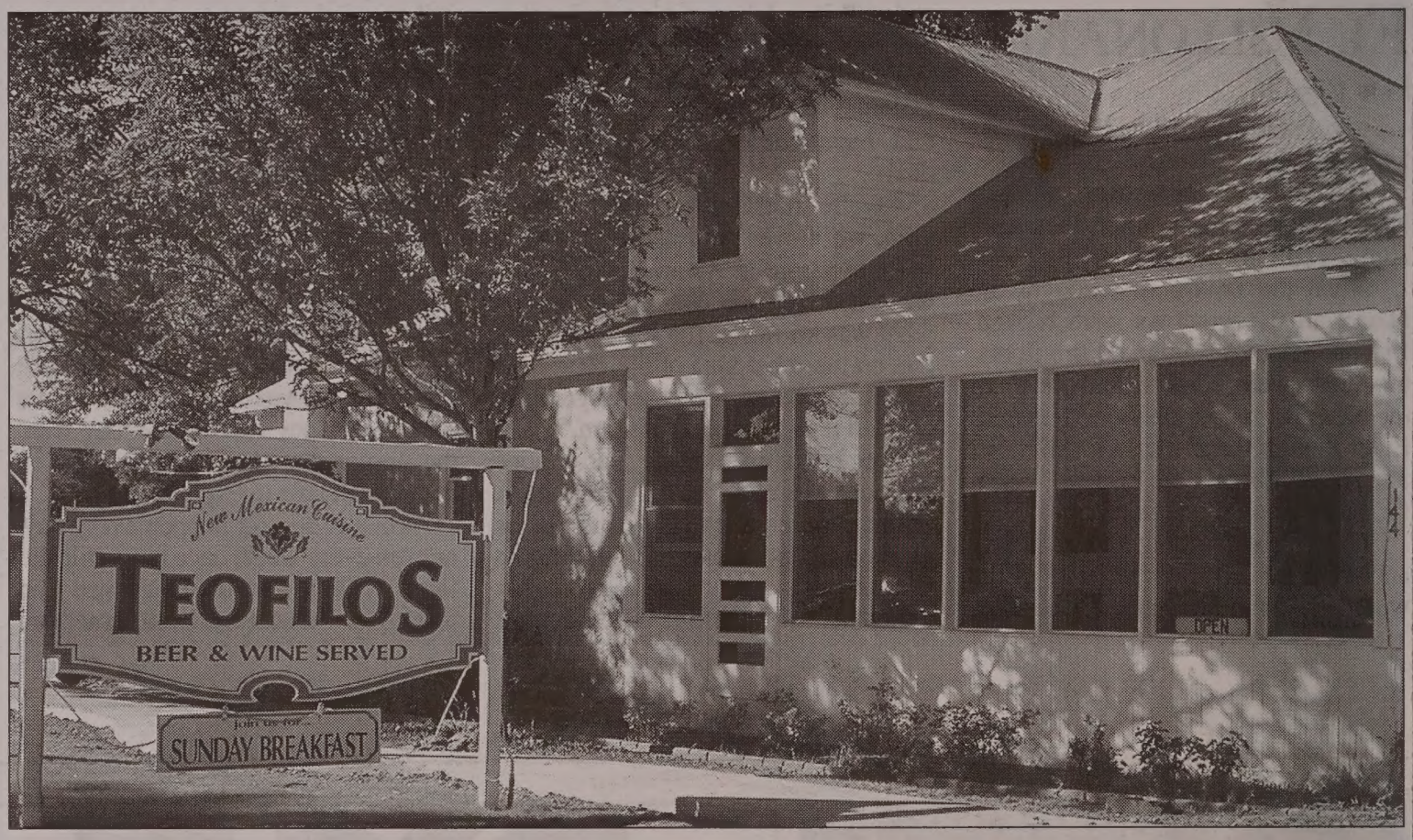
Over the years, the historic Wittwer house in downtown Los Lunas has seen many people come and go — initially, as the village's first physician's office, a private home and now a New Mexican restaurant.

More than 90 years ago, the building, which now is home to Teofilo's Restaurant, was constructed and served as both the home and office of Dr. William Frederick Wittwer. The unique charm of this house may not hold a significantly historic claim to the area, but the man who lived in it does.

In 1899, Wittwer stepped off the train in Los Lunas not knowing that he would spend the rest of his life helping, caring for and healing its citizens. The young doctor was on his way to El Paso for a promising career as a railroad doctor. During his time in the county seat, village leaders realized that they could not allow Wittwer to continue with his journey and convinced him to stay.

With a salary of $50 a month, Wittwer settled in and soon began practicing medicine. Word got around that Los Lunas had a doctor and his practice began to flourish. Nearly 15 years after he first arrived, the house was built for the doctor and his family on land purchased from the Solomon Luna estate. The home was also used as the doctor's office.

The architectural design, which was under the supervision of the doctor's wife, Anna Nowlin, kept with the period and features terron-wall construction and a high, pitched, corrugated tin roof. The Spanish structural and ornamental design of the home provided its unique charm.



Clara Garcia-News-Bulletin photo

THE OLD WITTWER PLACE is visited by as many folks now that it's a restaurant as there were in its days as a doctor's office.

"We have so many customers who come in sharing their memories of Dr. Wittwer," said Hortencia Torres, owner of Teofilos. "They come in and tell us that the doctor delivered them and treated so many people here."

After Wittwer passed on, several families lived in the historic house, but it wasn't until the mid-'80s that the Torres family found it and decided to buy the building, restore it and open the restaurant.

According to Hortencia, when she and her husband, Pete, first found the building, they weren't aware of its historic value.

Once the Torreses became aware of the treasure they'd hit upon, the task of renovating the old house into a restaurant began.

Not only were the Torreses able to maintain the integrity of the building, they also found several pieces of historic furniture which the good doctor's family left behind. A tall wooden chest, which was used by Wittwer to store his medical instruments, now sits in the restaurant's lobby area.

While the Torres family learned a lot about the history of the house during the renovation, Hortencia said they relied a lot on the research done by George Pearl, a renowned historical architect from Albuquerque, and Wittwer's grandson, William Officer.

They preserved two of the original murals the doctor's wife, Fanny Bell, had painted on the walls.

Even before the Torres family opened Teofilo's Restaurant, they decided that in order to maintain the authenticity of the Wittwer home, they should place it on the National Register of Historical Places. Their mission, which took numerous months, was finally accomplished two years after the restaurant opened for business.

While the Torreses continue to preserve the history of the Wittwer House, they are also sustaining their own family traditions, now three generations old, as among the county's paramount restaurateurs.

As for the future of the house, the Torreses maintain that they will always keep the doctor's memory alive while continuing making their own.

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